

STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 15 December 2011 commencing at 4.45 pm and finishing at 6:00pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor A.M. Lovatt – in the Chair

Councillor Jean Fooks
Councillor Norman Bolster
Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles
Councillor Chip Sherwood
Councillor Dr Peter Skolar
Councillor David Wilmshurst
Councillor Charles Mathew (In place of Councillor Nick Carter)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Jim Couchman, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property
Councillor David Robertson, Deputy Leader

By Invitation:

Officers:

Whole of meeting Lorna Baxter (acting Head of Corporate Finance)
Paul Gerrish (interim Deputy Director Oxfordshire Customer Services)
Huw Jones (Director Environment and Economy)
Sue Scane (Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer)
Graham Shaw (Head of ICT Business Delivery)
Martin Tugwell (Deputy Director Growth and Infrastructure)
Julia Lim (Scrutiny Officer)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item Officer Attending

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.

56/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Carter (Councillor Mathew substituting) and Councillor Sherwood.

57/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

None.

58/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 3)

None.

59/11 SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING 2012/13 - 2016/17

(Agenda No. 4)

The Committee received a presentation from Huw Jones (Director of Environment & Economy) on the Environment & Economy (E&E) business strategy in relation to Property and Oxfordshire Customer Services (including ICT) and looked at changes and variations in Annex 4 in detail.

Huw explained that the majority of savings in E&E going forward would be achieved by changing the way the directorate works, through strategic asset management, ICT and workforce planning.

Proposals for savings in the property area were discussed first.

In giving their support for the proposals some **Members did express concern about risks to the Council being increased through exposure to external providers.** Huw Jones explained the due diligence processes in place and offered to explain the approach to contracting further to any Members that were interested.

Cllr Brighouse was happy to accept this offer.

Oxfordshire Customer Services (OCS) and ICT were then discussed. Members were keen to understand more about the decision not to pursue arms-length trading in OCS. The substantial changes to the market caused by the financial constraints in local government and significant savings already achieved in OCS were explained as the reasons.

The Committee were interested to hear about the challenges facing the Oxfordshire Community Network (OCN) and Public Service Network. Officers stressed the importance of investment in the County's ICT offer, particularly in the context of the expansion of superfast broadband to ensure it remains competitive option for schools and other users.

Members were happy with the explanations given for variations to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). **Huw Jones welcomed questions from the scrutiny committee on implementation throughout the year.**

Chief Executive's Office

Four minor variations to the MTFP as set out in Annex 4, were explained by Sue Scane (Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer). The committee expressed concerns about the impact that staffing reductions in the Chief Executive's Office was having on staff workload and stress levels.

Councillor Fooks asked for a report on changes to staffing arrangements in the Chief Executive's Office to be added to the future work plan of the committee. This was agreed by the Chairman.

The importance of working differently and maximising the use of IT in future in order to maintain levels of service to frontline customers was stressed by both the Assistant Chief Executive and Councillors Robertson and Couchman.

The Committee broadly supported the Chief Executive's Office Business Strategy.

Capital Strategy

Members supported the capital strategy as set out in Annex 7b.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing